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The “Midtown Revival”

A decidedly urban neighborhood, Corcoran is characterized by a diverse population. It is a neighborhood whose scale has traditionally encouraged strolling. With Lake Street as its active commercial center, much of the remainder of the neighborhood is comprised of quiet, tree-lined residential streets, all within a short walk of Lake Street. Located roughly halfway between Lake Calhoun and the Mississippi River, and between downtown Minneapolis and the airport, some view this stretch of Lake Street as “Midtown.”

Lake Street, as it passes through Midtown today, is a commercial corridor with many uses or properties that are either out of context, a drastic underutilization of premier urban property, or in a dilapidated state. However, with Light Rail Transit along Hiawatha Avenue under construction and an LRT station at Lake Street coming soon, investment interests are emerging along Lake Street and it would appear that this area is on the verge of a major “Revival.” Everywhere change is inevitable, but with the advent of light rail in the neighborhood, and a renewed interest in the corridor, change is coming to Corcoran.

The “Corcoran Midtown Revival,” as the residents have come to call this plan, is about being proactive in shaping change that enhances the experience of living in an urban neighborhood. It’s about better connecting the neighborhood to the amenities and opportunities of the whole city.

There are a variety of differing opinions on what the neighborhood should look like and how it should function within the context of a metropolitan region. These differing opinions have frequently been expressed at the numerous neighborhood meetings and gatherings over the last several years. However, within these different viewpoints, common ground can be found. More than anything, the residents of the neighborhood want to enhance the urban qualities that make Corcoran unique.

It is generally agreed that a mix of uses that support the neighborhood and the pending LRT station should be incorporated in plans. Residents want to enhance the pedestrian experience, making it once again desirable to stroll along Lake Street (passing along street level commercial that frames the street) and easy to reach the future LRT station on foot. A mix of housing types and densities that are available to people of all income levels will preserve the diversity that has traditionally been a part of the neighborhood.



Process

At the outset of this effort it was recognized that the time for planning was over, and that the time had come for implementing projects in the neighborhood. Ultimately, this would be a process that defined those key initiatives and shaped a framework for development that the community could support as it moved into the future; it would become a document that would demonstrate neighborhood concerns and goals and would ensure that these will be addressed by future development in the Corcoran Neighborhood.

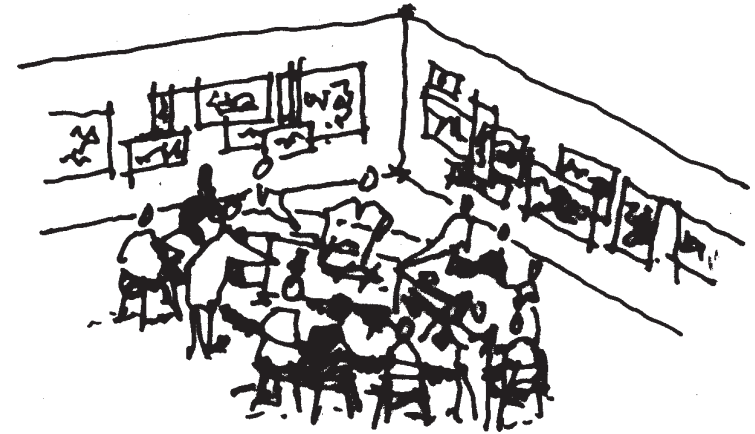
“By redefining community development at a grass roots level, the Corcoran Plan will provide essential, affordable services and develop linkages to other community-based agencies, businesses and entities as well as encourage non-automobile transit.”

CNO Request For Proposals, June 1, 2001

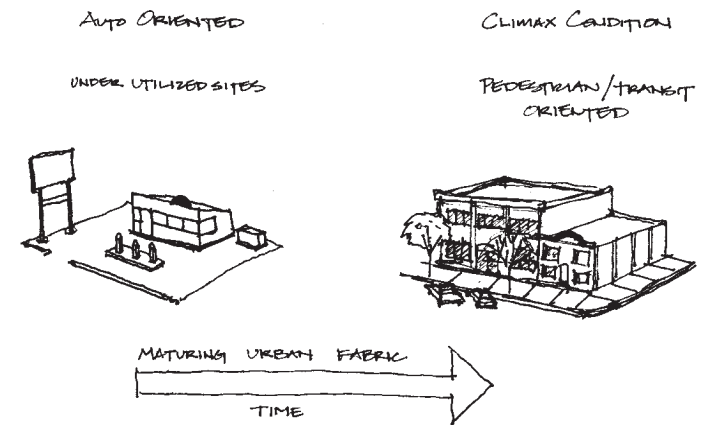
Creative minds and innovative thinkers have imagined what the Lake Street Corridor could be in the future. Building from a long list of planning efforts, the Corcoran Midtown Revival is about moving plans and big ideas toward implementation. This document serves as a strategic guide that defines first step projects. It is important that the master plan incorporates the long-range priorities of the neighborhood and its major stakeholders and that it coordinates with long-range objectives of existing planning. The master plan is based on a shared vision. It is a tool that will guide the Corcoran Neighborhood for many years to come, ensuring that Corcoran remains a vital part of the city and the lives of its residents.

To that end, the Corcoran Midtown Revival evolved from a series of workshops that confirmed, rationalized, justified and modified previous planning efforts. The workshops included assembling broad based ideas about how the project area may look and feel as it evolves and then applying those ideas to a map of the project area. These workshops began with a list of ideas presented during more recent planning efforts including the Hi-Lake Station Area Master Plan and the East End Revival. Summaries of various meetings and previous planning efforts can be found in the appendices of this document.

Introduction



Building consensus around solutions to community problems and opportunities



Establishing guidelines for a desired design pattern

Goals and Objectives

The following are objectives of the Corcoran Midtown Revival Plan:

- to use a consensus-building process to address implications and concerns raised by previous community planning efforts
- to create specific project and design guidelines that describe Corcoran's desired development pattern along Lake Street and adjacent neighborhoods, a pattern which reflects the community's values and vision, a mix of land uses, a pedestrian-friendly environment and a transit-oriented development pattern
- to create a document that will be used as a tool to attract and guide new development and redevelopment, assisting the Corcoran Neighborhood in passing on informed recommendations to the Minneapolis City Council and other regional governments
- to build a support mechanism (or resource) that helps prospective developers assemble projects that recognize the needs of the development while responding to a greater need of the Midtown area.

As so many planning efforts over the years have addressed this area, residents have an understandable level of fear about undertaking additional efforts, and part of the charge of this process is to allay those fears. The Corcoran Neighborhood is at a point where it must build on the existing sense of community and ensure forward progress by building on the foundations of existing studies. Appropriate resident involvement at all phases of the process is critical to current and future successes.

“Foundation” Documents (see Appendix A)

To begin this process a summary of the substantive planning documents was generated outlining key directives that should be carried forward in this initiative and, in some cases, tested for relevancy or accurateness. Two key recent planning reports provide direct input and assistance into this document. The Hiawatha/Lake Station Area Master Plan was a study conducted by the City of Minneapolis for a 1/2 mile radius around the proposed LRT station. This study identified strategies and a master plan to maximize opportunities presented by LRT. The other plan is the East End Revival plan which outlined a series of initiatives based on the directions of the communities involved and the Hiawatha/Lake Station Area Master Plan. These documents and others are summarized in Appendix A “Foundation Documents”.



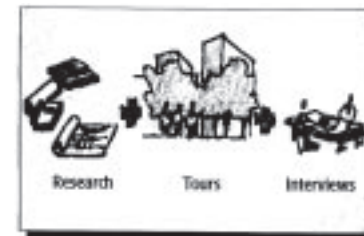
Workshop Summaries~Issues and Ideas

In September 2001, an initial community workshop was held to frame the issues and provide input into the plan. At this workshop, individuals identified issues of concern on a large neighborhood map and then discussed these concerns in small groups to determine those issues that are most important to the neighborhood as a whole.

Following is a summary of the most important issues, as identified by the small groups:

- Parking is seen as an issue for businesses and in residential areas. The consensus among the groups is that Corcoran needs more parking and/or better management of parking areas.
- Community-building is important if a neighborhood is to turn itself around. "Be nice!" was the comment.
- Crime, in general, and prostitution and drugs, in particular, are a major neighborhood concern.
- Abandoned buildings and other "dead spaces" in the neighborhood are holes that project a negative image. These spaces could be better utilized for housing,

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local businesses, or open spaces. The gas station at the corner of Lake and 19th was mentioned frequently. Chain-link and barbed wire also project a negative image.

- Trash was frequently mentioned as a problem that needs to be addressed throughout the neighborhood.
- Community-oriented services, such as locally- owned small businesses, offices, markets, co-ops, and coffee shops are absent from the neighborhood. A diverse population calls Corcoran home and the consensus is that there exists lack of a "creative, unusual, engaging [mix of] businesses... where we can meet others in our community." Along those same lines, a theater/arts center would be a good fit for the neighborhood.
- Green spaces are needed in the neighborhood.
- Traffic congestion and pedestrian safety throughout the neighborhood are concerns. Lake Street is already perceived as overly congested, and the community is concerned that the future LRT station could potentially contribute greatly to traffic in the neighborhood. Traffic calming and improved bike and pedestrian connections to the station and within the neighborhood are ideas the community would like to explore.
- A negative image of the community is an issue. "Dead spaces," where buildings are abandoned or torn down and weedy under-used parking lots contribute to this image. Infill development with "good, creative, unusual architecture and design [will help] build community identity." Other ideas included adding windows for South High School and adding community entry features such as flags at the neighborhood's edge.

Some individual responses from the neighborhood map that were not reflected in the group responses included:

- Houses in need of paint
- Lack of ethnic restaurants
- Noise – loud music and honking
- Desire for the South High fields to be open to the public
- Feeling that South High should take responsibility for its own parking problems
- Lack of a continuous street wall along Lake Street
- "Problem properties" were specifically identified
- Too many parked cars on residential streets



Community members and business persons discussing issues and ideas at a workshop

- Need for a 4-way stop at the intersection of 22nd and 31st
- Narrow sidewalk on north side of Lake Street—little room for bus passengers
- Too few crosswalks on Lake Street
- Blind turns into and out of alleys in residential areas, due primarily to the number of parked cars
- Lack of pedestrian crossing of Hiawatha at 32nd (referred to as a “stealth death lane” on the neighborhood map)

Small groups were next asked to generate some ideas that begin to address the issues and concerns identified in the first exercise. Several “seed” idea cards, which the groups responded to and elaborated upon, were put forth to start the exercise. Groups also generated several of their own original ideas. A brief summary of these idea cards follows:

- ***Infill housing*** Under-utilized spaces in the neighborhood, from vacant lots to the upper stories above Lake Street commercial uses, have the potential to provide for the neighborhood’s housing needs today and in the future. It also provides more “eyes on the street,” creating a sense of neighborhood ownership that is missing from vacant and/or under-utilized properties. It is important that the community’s priorities for rehab and/or redevelopment be respected. Affordability and the availability of owner-occupied units are important elements in a neighborhood housing mix that would accommodate a wide range of ages and income levels. Creating some “high-dollar” units—possibly with rooftop gardens taking advantage of city views—to offset the cost of creating affordable units was offered as a potential strategy.
- ***Blending density and character*** The character and quality of residential development are very important. Higher density is an option only if it blends well with the character of existing development and the adjacent single family neighborhoods. Some ideas from the neighborhood include varying heights, styles, and costs. New housing “shouldn’t look like a project.” Green space and parking, including parking at the back of units as well as underground, should be incorporated. Positive examples of higher density housing styles from cities such as Boston were mentioned. And the potential exists for some truly unique housing near the LRT line that could be a showcase for art and environmental sensitivity, an icon that contributes to a positive identity for the neighborhood.

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Illustrations of varying housing types that may be appropriate to the Midtown area.



Higher density housing is appropriate nearest the LRT station because the convenience of being near public transit lessens the necessity of owning a car. Good design can create high density housing while enhancing the pedestrian environment and appearing less dense.

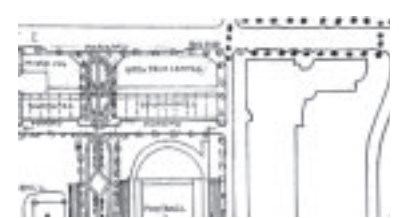
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The Hundertwasser Haus in Vienna was cited as a positive example. Many “foundation” planning documents suggest higher density housing near the LRT station to take advantage of close proximity to public transit.

- **Public market** A public market, offering a variety of goods and services from independent, local vendors would be a place for the neighborhood to gather any time of day or evening. Fresh seafood, meat, produce, flowers, baked goods, coffee, wine, and even prepared foods could combine with arts, crafts, plants and other non-food items. Book shops and cooking classes could highlight the area’s “international flavors.”
- **Arts Center** Residents would like to see an arts center that would be a “beehive of arts activity,” with performance space, gallery space and space for an arts market. The arts center concept could be part of the public market. If not attached to a public market, an arts center would be equally suited adjacent to South High or the YWCA and could include a technology center, creating a “community campus” of sorts as illustrated in the South Community Campus Concept Plans prepared by Chang.
- **Evening Activity** Mixing commercial uses so that a diversity of business occurs on Lake Street at a variety of times throughout the day is important to maintain a safe and active street. Mixing entertainment uses such as restaurants, bars, arts and culture uses with retail and office uses provides that mix. Locally-owned businesses, such as family-oriented restaurants, bars, and coffee shops would be welcome in the neighborhood and would increase evening activity in the community, creating a safer, more lively environment. Outdoor dining would contribute positively to the neighborhood’s image and add more eyes on the street. A casual neighborhood bar could become an informal gathering place that is “open after 9:00,” and could even become another outlet for local musicians or performance artists. It was suggested that redevelopment at the southeast corner of Cedar and Lake should become a neighborhood icon, the “gateway into Corcoran Neighborhood,” with housing located above shops.



A variety of local goods and services would be provided in an enclosed building that would serve as a public market. (Public Market in Reading, Pennsylvania)



Two of three schemes from the South Community Campus Concept Plans that illustrate an Arts Center at the southwest corner of Lake Street and 21st Avenue



A broad mix of uses (day and evening) was suggested as a way to maintain a safe and active street. A mixture of culturally diverse entertainment, retail and residential uses is desired.

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- Public green space** This could be as simple as more trees on Lake Street, parking “bumpouts,” green spaces as bus waiting spaces, or community gardens on some of the vacant/abandoned lots and “leftover spaces” near the LRT line. The neighborhood is also interested in more extensive exploration involving a green stroll through the entire neighborhood that would connect pocket parks with homes, the South High campus, the YWCA, the LRT station, the Midtown Greenway, Corcoran Park and other neighborhood amenities. Areas for kids (young and old) to play, places to walk dogs, places for display of art, perhaps even water features are all seen as important. Any redevelopment plans for the site of the Edison PPL School should include public open space. To look out the windows of neighborhood gathering places onto green spaces and create linear green spaces along the major streets would present a positive image of the Corcoran Neighborhood to everyone associated with the community.
- Plaza streets** Creating a street environment that is more like a public plaza maintains the ability for through traffic while calming traffic and allowing for more uses than just a street. Locations suggested for plaza streets in the neighborhood include 31st between South High and the athletic field, 20th between Lake and the athletic field, and 21st between Lake and the Midtown Greenway. It was also suggested that some form of plaza-like treatment to all of the streets around South High and the YWCA would create more of a campus feel. Similar treatments, on a smaller scale, could be employed at strategic crosswalks and other areas that need to become more pedestrian friendly.
- Strolling Lake Street** Enhancing the sidewalks and storefronts along Lake Street to make it a more inviting and friendly pedestrian environment will improve safety and enhance business patronage. Improving bus shelters, adding benches, kiosks and awnings, as well as trees, planters, hanging baskets and public art will help create a more comfortable and engaging environment for people walking along Lake Street.



Public spaces (open spaces such as the cemetery or courtyards and plazas) were emphasized as being an important part of Lake Street and the Midtown area.



Some streets should accommodate more than just traffic. Some streets are more desirable as a place for neighborhood festivities, a pedestrian friendly environment or an identity element of the neighborhood.



Strolling is pastime that should be encouraged along Lake Street. The neighborhood desires a pedestrian friendly environment with wide sidewalks and an active street front.

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- **Connecting institutions to Lake Street** Civic buildings should be the highlights of a neighborhood, a point of pride for community. An obvious example in the Corcoran neighborhood is South High School, currently “buried” and invisible to the rest of the world. Opening up a stronger, more inviting connection to Lake Street, by creating physical and/or visual connections through the athletic field would place this institution in the fabric of the city while it continues to serve the immediate neighborhood. Less direct connections, such as better signage might also help achieve this goal. The neighborhood suggested incorporating other ideas such as plaza streets and green spaces. More visible, the institution would benefit from a face lift on the building, new bleachers and other site improvements.
- **More efficient parking** Parking, in its current configuration, is a problem in the neighborhood. Where new lots are constructed, such as the YWCA’s lot, consideration should be given to alternative parking strategies that maximize the number of cars accommodated in a limited space or that reduce the need or demand for parking. Surface lots, while adequate given the neighborhood’s current density, will be a very inefficient use of space as land uses in Corcoran intensify. Strict enforcement of parking laws, controlled lots and incentives for using mass transit, walking or biking will also help alleviate parking shortfalls.
- **Neighborhood identity landmark** All of the ideas listed above will help create a positive image for the Corcoran Neighborhood, but to “establish a Mid-Town identity” that residents feel is missing, an identity piece is needed. The neighborhood needs it’s own “Uptown Marquee” or “Eiffel Tower,” a signature piece that invites “LRT Riders to get out and explore.” Such a signature landmark could be a piece of art, but it is more likely a building—perhaps a building that continues the “green agenda of this area,” like the nearby Green Institute.

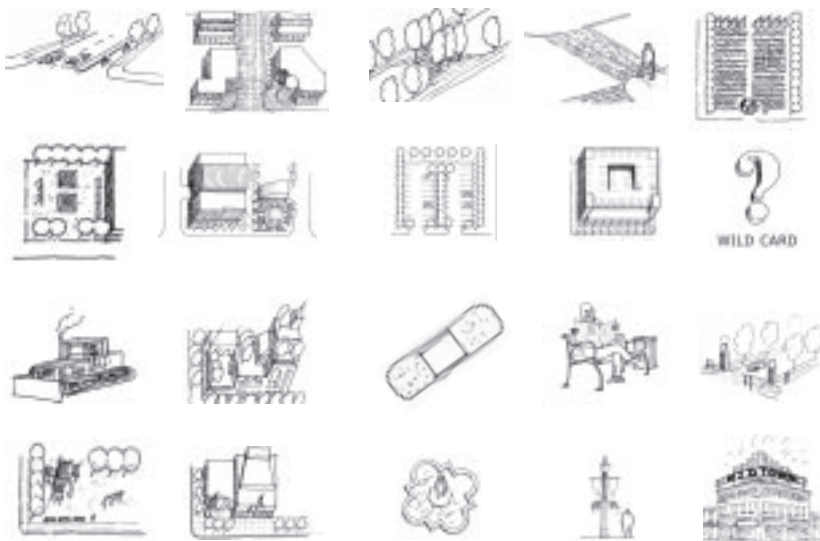


South High is an asset that should be better connected to Lake Street through a pedestrian corridor or street corridor with a prominent design feature.



Parking strategies are needed in the neighborhood to accommodate existing parking demand and to plan for future parking needs. Remote (valet) parking or underground parking may be appropriate. The picture at right illustrates an entrance to a shared parking facility for a neighborhood.

The next task for the community was to begin assembling these ideas on a map of the Corcoran Midtown Revival project area. The map was assembled in the format of a “game board” with a series of icons that represented the different ideas generated by previous workshops and planning initiatives. The exercise resulted in a graphic illustration of the ideas and strategies and where they might apply in the neighborhood.



Game pieces representing neighborhood generated were placed on the game board by participants of a public workshop. The resulting patterns began to demonstrate desires for development and enhancement of the neighborhood.



The final gameboard



CNO residents playing "the Game" at a public workshop



CNO residents playing "the Game" at a public workshop

Corcoran Midtown Revival

THE GAME - SUMMARY

LAKE STREET BETWEEN CEDAR AVE. AND 19TH AVE.

- *Vertically stacked mix of uses
- *Neighborhood retail at ground floor with a mix of office and residential above and rooftop gardens
- *Shared parking, particularly between church users and commercial users with little overlap
- *Parking behind and/or in structures to preserve valuable real estate along Lake Street for "higher" uses
- *Plaza streets at Longfellow and 19th to create n'hood entries
- *Lake Street courtyards, trees, benches, trash receptacles, lamp and banner poles to create a more comfortable strolling environment along Lake

LAKE STREET BETWEEN 19TH AVE. AND 21ST AVE.

- *Demolish and rebuild with a vertically stacked mix of uses
- *Neighborhood retail at ground floor with office and residential above, and rooftop gardens
- *Turn 20th into a plaza street and open up connection-visual and physical-to the South High fields
- *Arts Center
- *Make this a community festival space, maybe even with movable areas that can temporarily restrict traffic
- *Parking behind, underground and/or in structures, but not at street level along Lake
- *Shared parking, particularly between church and commercial users that do not have conflicts
- *Respect current legitimate users while planning for the future

THE YWCA

- *Build rooftop gardens where possible
- *Add retail carts in and around the Y
- *Consider additional parking capacity
- *Plaza streets on 21st and 22nd to create neighborhood entries

HD-LAKE CENTER AND THE HIAWATHA AVE./LAKE STREET AREA

- *Demolish and rebuild with a vertically stacked mix of uses
- *Neighborhood retail, particularly food and beverage-oriented (bagels frequently mentioned) at ground floor with several stories of residential and senior housing above, and rooftop gardens
- *High-end grocery, with healthy alternatives to big-box grocery chains
- *Underground and structured parking
- *Lake Street courtyards, interior green spaces and pocket parks
- *Trees, benches, trash receptacles, lamp and banner poles along Lake
- *Designated bikeway along 22nd between 32nd and the Midtown Greenway
- *Neighborhood gateway/Midtown Marquee at Lake and Hiawatha
- *Easy pedestrian connections to the new LRT station

THE LAKE STREET/CEDAR AVE. AREA

- *Gateway to the neighborhood, a place for a "Midtown Marquee"
- *Demolish and rebuild with mixed use, vertically stacked
- *Neighborhood retail at ground floor with residential and/or office above and rooftop gardens
- *A good place for neighborhood restaurants
- *Improvements to the public space at the street edge, with trees, benches and trash receptacles (Use the front of the "Y" as an example.)
- *Parking behind, possibly in a structure

CEDAR AVE. BETWEEN 32ND STREET AND LAKE STREET

- *Gateway to the neighborhood, a place for a "festival of lights"
- *Renovation and preservation combined with demolition of select properties
- *Neighborhood retail node at 32nd and Cedar
- *Residential infill along Cedar
- *Improve connection between 32nd and Lake through the use of trees, lamp/banner poles, and other streetscape improvements
- *A different kind of street than the rest of the neighborhood

SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL

- *South should accept responsibility for its parking problems and for the trash it generates
- *Public access to the recreational fields
- *Better connections to the neighborhood and to Lake Street
- *Greening of 31st in front of the school
- *More windows in the building

THE NEIGHBORHOOD BETWEEN 31ST AND 32ND STREETS

- *Renovation and Preservation of existing properties in general, with select demolition of certain badly deteriorated properties
- *Infill housing at a density consistent with existing, including townhomes and 4-plexes
- *Designated bikeway along 22nd between 32nd and the Midtown Greenway, and along 32nd across Hiawatha
- *Traffic calming along 31st
- *More trees along 31st, generally green up the whole street
- *Neighborhood-wide parking strategy that deals with South High (The feeling is that the neighborhood currently gives up way too much to South High.)
- *"Adopt-a-Block" strategy for neighborhood cleaning/maintenance

EDISON PPL AND THE 31ST STREET/HIAWATHA AVE. AREA

- *Demolish and rebuild with a vertically stacked mix of uses that creates a mass at this node (Calhoun Commons mentioned as an example.)
- *Public market and arts center
- *Neighborhood retail, high density residential and senior housing above with rooftop gardens
- *Open space, pocket parks, courtyards and green space
- *Unique, signature architecture within view of the LRT contributing to a distinct identity for the neighborhood
- *Pedestrian corridors along the east side of the Edison PPL site making easy connections to the LRT station
- *Underground and structured parking
- *Lake Street courtyards
- *Trees, benches, trash receptacles, lamp and banner poles along Lake
- *Designated bikeway along 22nd between 32nd and the Midtown Greenway
- *Neighborhood gateway/Midtown Marquee at Lake and Hiawatha

